



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Special Meeting on April 18, 2015 at 6:20 p.m. at Warren Town Hall. The presiding officer was Karen Dionne. Board members present were Sara Volino, Ben Terry, Mark Lombardi and Stephen Sypole. Board member Kathleen Tucciarone was absent. Stephen Smith was present as a guest. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

1. Update on new Warren website.

Ms. Dionne reported that at this time funding has been approved by the Town Council for a new municipal website for the town of Warren. The next hurdle for approval is the upcoming town financial meeting. The cost of the website is approximately \$15,000. If the funding is approved at the financial town meeting, the next step will be releasing an RFP and getting proposals from companies specializing in civic websites. Ms. Dionne said that the town planner would be willing to help in writing the RFP for this project.

2. Update and review of research and status on town website and recommendations to Town Council.

Discussed as part of agenda item #1.

3. Discussion regarding neglected and empty storefronts in Main/Market/Child Streets business area, and possible recommendations to Town Council on zoning code standards and enforcement.

The board discussed the overall negative appearance of vacant and neglected storefronts and property in the Main/Market/Child Street business area. Basically the overall appearance in this area is unfriendly to pedestrian traffic which obviously impacts commerce for small businesses. The board discussed writing a letter about the issue to the town manager and the zoning official. Mr. Sypole and Mr. Terry agreed to work on a sub-committee to draft a letter to Town Council regarding zoning enforcement in the downtown area. The sub-committee will present the draft of the letter at the May meeting. Mr. Lombardi and Ms. Volino will meet with the town manager and the zoning official to discuss this issue. The overall goal of discussion is to promote business by making the street more attractive and filling vacant storefronts. Mr. Sypole said that he would research zoning ordinances that relate to property maintenance and signage.

4. Discussion of Town Charter description and duties of the EDB.

The board discussed the limitations of the EDB's role as an advisory board to the Town Council. As an advisory board the recommendations and suggestions from the EDB lack the strength to advocate for meaningful change in the business community. Mr. Smith said that he will meet with Julie Blount to further discuss the mission statement of the EDB currently in the town charter.

5. Discussion of EDB initiatives of remainder of 2015.

Ms. Dionne and Mr. Smith will continue to guide the development of the new town website. Mr. Terry will contact the town planner regarding process of improvements along the bike path and Railroad Avenue. The board discussed promoting an open forum for Warren business owners in September. The board agreed that the event should be a separate event from a regular EDB meeting. Business owners would be personally invited to the event by EDB members and the meeting would be held at a local business venue such as Hope and Main or Parker Mills. This item will be discussed further over the summer.

6. Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn by Ms. Volino, the motion was seconded by Ms. Dionne, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald
May 18, 2015

